

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 INR-10 L-03 NEA-11

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

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AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

USMISSION GENEVA

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD BY POUCH

USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 2457

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, US

SUBJECT: CURRENT SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S. APPROACH
TO DETENTE

GENEVA FOR USDEL CSCE

REF: MOSCOW 2198

1. SUMMARY. RECENT CONVERSATIONS WE HAVE HAD WITH
SOVIETS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN U.S.-SOVIET AFFAIRS HAVE
REVEALED CONCERN, BUT NOT ALARM, THAT THE UNITED STATES
MAY BE GROWING DISENCHANTED WITH SOME ASPECTS OF DETENTE.
THE CONCERN IS CURRENTLY RUNNING STRONGEST WITH RESPECT
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TO U.S. DEFENSE POLICY, IN PARTICULAR THE NEW U.S.

STRATEGIC APPROACHES AND THE BUDGET REQUESTS FOR NEW WEAPONS SYSTEMS. APPREHENSION ON MFA AND CREDITS CONTINUES, BUT THE ISSUES SEEMS TO SOVIETS LESS AN ECONOMIC ONE THAN A TEST OF CONTINUED U.S. COMMITMENT TO BILATERAL DETENTE. SOVIETS CONTINUE TO ACCEPT THE BONA FIDES OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S STATEMENTS IN FAVOR OF DETENTE, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE BEGUN TO PUT A COLD WAR STAMP ON DEFSEC SCHLESINGER. THERE CONTINUES TO BE WORRY ABOUT THE ADMINISTRATION'S ABILITY TO PRESS ITS VIEW ON DETENTE ON A RECALCITRANT CONGRESS. AND WE CONTINUE TO HEAR PRIVATE STATEMENTS OF CONCERN ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S FUTURE, ALTHOUGH WATERGATE HAS AGAIN VIRTUALLY DISAPPEARED FROM THE NEWSPAPERS. AT THIS STAGE THE SOVIETS DO NOT APPEAR GREATLY DISTURBED BY THE EFFECT OF THE SOLZHENITSYN EXPULSION ON U.S. OPINION; THEY SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT SOLZHENITSYN WAS HANDLED IN THE WAY BEST CALCULATED TO MINIMIZE FOREIGN POLICY DAMAGE. END SUMMARY.

2. IN OUR RECENT TALKS WITH SOVIET AMERICAN SPECIALISTS IN THE USA INSTITUTE, IN THE MFA'S USA DIVISION, IN ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS, AND IN THE PRESS, WE HAVE TRIED TO DRAW THEM OUT ON THEIR CURRENT VIEW OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. WE SENSE A CONCERN ABOUT U.S. ATTITUDES BUT NO ATTEMPT ON THEIR PART TO PAINT A BLEAK PICTURE OF BILATERAL PROSPECTS. INDEED THEIR GENERAL EVALUATION OF THE FUTURE REMAINS A CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ONE.

3. THE GREATEST AREA OF APPREHENSION AMONG OUR SOVIET INTERLOCUTORS IS DEFENSE. THE ELEMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S DEFENSE BUDGET THAT SEEMS TO BOTHER THEM MOST IS THE REQUEST FOR MONEY FOR NEW WEAPONS SYSTEMS. MUCH OF THIS SEEMS FAIRLY NORMAL FOR THE PERIOD OF U.S. BUDGET SUBMISSIONS. A MORE SERIOUS FACTOR --ALTHOUGH ONE ON WHICH SOVIETS STILL DISPLAY SOME CONFUSION -- IS THE NEW TARGETING APPROACH OUTLINED BY SECRETARY SCHLESINGER. USA INSTITUTE DIRECTOR ARBATOV TOLD THE CHARGE FEBRUARY 14 THAT STATEMENTS BY SCHLESINGER ON THE SUBJECT TENDED TO INCITE THE ARMS RACE AND CREATE TENSIONS (BUT HE LISTENED CAREFULLY TO ARGUMENTS
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TO THE CONTRARY AND ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD PERUSED TEXTS OF SCHLESINGER'S RECENT STATEMENTS, INCLUDING HIS EMPHASIS ON MUTUAL DETERRENCE). SCHLESINGER HAS BEEN HEAVILY CRITICIZED IN THE SOVIET PRESS; IN AN AUTHORITATIVE PRAVDA COMMENTARY ON SALT (REFTEL) HE WAS LUMPED WITH SOVIET BETE NOIRE JOSEPH ALSOP.

4. IN THE ECONOMIC AREA SOVIETS CONTINUE TO PROBE AMERICAN VISITORS ON THE MFN/CREDITS ISSUE. REP MATHIAS WAS RECENTLY SUBJECTED TO CLOSE QUESTIONING ON PROSPECTS BY A GROUP OF IZVESTIYA EDITORS; THE INTERVIEW, AS RAN (IZVESTIYA FEBRUARY 19), CAME OUT POSITIVE -- "SOONER RATHER THAN LATER" THE PROBLEM WOULD BE SOLVED. NEVERTHELESS, SOVIETS IN THE KNOW SEEM TO HAVE RESIGNED THEMSELVES TO A POSSIBLE UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME ON MFN/CREDITS, AT LEAST FOR THIS YEAR. WORKING LEVEL ECONOMIC OFFICIALS HAVE DESCRIBED THE PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF A DEFEAT ON TITLE IV IN LESS THAN CATAclysmic TERMS. THEY SAY IT WOULD RESULT IN A COOLER WELCOME TO AMERICAN FIRMS, A TOUGHER SOVIET ATTITUDE ON COMMERCIAL NEGOTIATIONS, AND LESS FRIENDLY WORKING RELATIONSHIPS FOR U.S. BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES LIVING IN MOSCOW. MORE POLITICALLY ORIENTED SOVIETS, LIKE ARBATOV SEE THE ISSUE LESS AS AN ECONOMIC ONE THAN AS A TEST OF AMERICA'S POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO DETENTE. ONE SCHOLAR IN ARBATOV'S INSTITUTE SAID THAT TRADE WOULD INCREASE WITHOUT MFN; THE REAL QUESTION WAS ONE OF PRINCIPLE -- WHETHER THE U.S., IN TYING MFN TO EMIGRATION, "HAS THE RIGHT TO TELL US HOW WE SHOULD ACT." THE SAME MAN, LATER IN THE CONVERSATION, PUT THE CREDITS ISSUE IN A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, ASKING WHETHER THE U.S. WAS PREPARED TO UNDERTAKE LONG-TERM ECONOMIC COMMITMENTS, AS THE SOVIETS WERE.

5. EXCEPT FOR SCHLESINGER, WHOM THE SOVIETS HAVE TENDED TO TREAT SEPARATELY FROM THE REST OF THE ADMINISTRATION, OUR SOVIET SOURCES DO NOT QUESTION THE BONA FIDES OF THE ADMINISTRATION IN SEEKING CONTINUED BILATERAL PROGRESS. AND THEY HAVE NOT TO THIS POINT DRAWN SWEEPING CONCLUSIONS ABOUT A POSSIBLE DISEN-

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CHALLENGE WITH DETENTE ON THE PART OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. WHILE THEY ARE PRONE TO SPEAK OF "ARTIFICIAL STIMULATION" OF THE EMIGRATION ISSUE, THEY SEEM PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE POLLSTERS' CONCLUSIONS THAT AMERICANS CAN BE SIMULTANEOUSLY FOR DETENTE AND AGAINST SOVIET DOMESTIC POLICIES. ARBATOV, WHO HAS JUST RETURNED FROM A MONTH IN THE U.S., SAID HE FOUND THE SUPPORT FOR DETENTE GREATER THAN HE HAD BEEN LED TO BELIEVE THROUGH READING THE AMERICAN PRESS.

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6. SOVIET U.S.-WATCHERS CONTINUE TO VOICE CONCERN ABOUT THE LIMITS OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH'S INFLUENCE OVER CONGRESS, AS ILLUSTRATED IN THE MFN TRAVAIL. NOW ARBATOV HAS GIVEN VENT TO A NEW CONCERN -- THAT THE ENERGY CRISIS AND OTHER FACTORS ARE CAUSING AMERICANS TO TURN INWARD. WHILE NOTING THE "POSITIVE" EFFECT THIS COULD HAVE IN CURBING U.S. WORLDWIDE AGGRESSIVENESS, HE WENT ON TO SAY REGRETFULLY THAT IT MIGHT ALSO DETRACT FROM THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ENERGY AND ABILITY IN PURSUING DETENTE.

7. WATERGATE REMAINS A MAJOR SUBLIMINAL PROBLEM AMONG SOVIETS. THE PRESS HAS CARRIED VIRTUALLY NOTHING ON IT FOR WEEKS. IZVESTIYA'S WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT
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ARTAMANOV MANAGED TO WRITE A FOUR-COLUMN PIECE (FEB. 13) ON THE COMING CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS WITHOUT A SINGLE ALLUSION TO THE ISSUE. BUT PRIVATELY SOVIETS CONTINUE TO WORRY. USA MAGAZINE EDITOR BEREZHKOVA RAISED THE ISSUE WITH AN EMBOFF A FEW DAYS AGO, EXPRESSING DEEP CONCERN ABOUT THE POSITION OF THE PRESIDENT.

8. WHILE IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO ASSESS THE OVERALL EFFECT ON DETENTE ON THE SOLZHENITSYN AFFAIR, SOVIETS TO WHOM WE HAVE TALKED APPEAR TO FEEL THAT THE REGIME HAS SUCCEEDED IN MINIMIZING THE FOREIGN POLICY DAMAGE. IN THEIR COMMENTS THEY HAVE PLAYED HEAVILY ON THE "HUMANITARIAN" ASPECTS OF THE EXPULSION (E.G. "THE PUNISHMENT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE," "SOLZHENITSYN'S FAMILY CAN JOIN HIM"). EVEN KOSYGIN AND GROMYKO HAVE MADE STATEMENTS TO WESTERN NEWSMEN EMPHASIZING THE OFFER TO THE WRITER'S FAMILY. THE REGIME NO DOUBT HAS ALSO COUNTED ON THE PROBABILITY THAT, AS LONG AS HIS FAMILY IS STILL IN THE SOVIET UNION, SOLZHENITSYN WILL NOT BE ABLE TO TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE FIRST WAVE OF PUBLICITY BY MAKING STRONG ANTI-REGIME STATEMENTS. IN SUM, THE SOVIETS SEEM TO FEEL THAT -- IN TERMS BOTH OF WESTERN AND SPECIFICALLY OF U.S. OPINION -- THEY CAN RIDE OUT THE STORM.
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